

AN: Only five more stories left after this, you know. Things are getting way too tense for my liking. You couldn't even cut it with a knife! This is a story filled with pure shock and horror, so I will remind you to breathe. Deep breaths...

Poison

Spilled Milk

Tuhuma took a drag from his cigarette and glanced nervously around the forested surroundings, making sure that there was no one else around – particularly dealers and certain law enforcement individuals who were against them. The former seemed more pressing, since the forest was unpleasantly rife with pushers who would sell their grandmother if it meant earning more money.

And Tuhuma didn't need the competition.

Oh, the dealers in the forest were rampant; they were like a disease. One that threatened infectious highs for reasonable prices. Buy one, get one free. While stocks last. Terms and conditions apply. Tuhuma thought that he would never hear such words again; his old job at the Cheese-Mart seemed another life away...

But then he had only been a cashier at a store. Now he was a top dealer for the intimidating drug gang, the Family of Blood. Second in ranking, to be exact.

Tuhuma hoped to push that up to number one.

It was like a competition between the dealers. Who could sell the most Sumu? Every animal who was involved in the sale of the deadly drug was clawing – sometimes literally – for a position at the top spot. They came up with their own little techniques and methods in order to improve their status. From arranging wild parties to offering customers some free weed with their usual hit. Maybe then they would be more inclined to buy from you.

Tuhuma didn't have any extras or persuasive deals as such. He just gave his users what they asked for: some serious S that kicked harder than a mule. What made him so successful was the fact that he worked practically all day. 24/7 without ever stopping. The shifts were even longer than his days at the Cheese-Mart.

And yet, this new job seemed so much more rewarding.

He lived for the desperation in the addicts' eyes, and the smiles that followed when they got what they were begging for. It was all too easy. Users needed their next hit at any given time of the day, and Tuhuma was always there to supply it. While all the other dealers – or the scum, as he'd christened them – got high and wasted, he remained a faithful outlet. He barely rested, but he didn't care. It would all pay off in the end.

He needed to be number one. He deserved it.

But no. The best dealer for the Family of Blood wasn't some top-end businessman with a diploma in Drug Dealing, or a psychotic hypnotist who could turn you into an addict with the swing of a watch. In fact, the best dealer was so scummy that Tuhuma could scarcely believe it.

His name was Moto.

Tuhuma always tensed up when he thought of his name. It was more than enough to boil his blood and incinerate his calmness. That sack of soil didn't even deserve to call himself a salesman; he was a slimy drug addict with no abilities in his body, and he knew it.

So how was he the top dealer?

Well, if Tuhuma had the answer to that question, then he deserved a nationwide award for intelligence. As far as Moto went, his sales skills were a complete mystery. He was dealing one, two – someone once even said *three* – pounds a day. He was relentless, like a shark cutting through the waters.

And he kept improving with each passing day.

Tuhuma couldn't comprehend it. That cub – whose mind was only occupied with money, sex and Sumu – had risen to become the Family of Blood's best friend, practically. He was making them more money than Death could have ever dreamed of – and this was a much smaller operation, too. It was baffling.

Still, Tuhuma knew that he could beat him. It was only a matter of time before that cub slipped up and became sidetracked by a marathon of snorting Sumu or some attractive lioness. That was when he would let his guard down, and Tuhuma would take his place. He was already just about managing to sell two pounds a day. A few more hours spent on the job and maybe he could surpass him.

Not that the cub was greedy or anything. Unlike Moto, who was interested solely in making "cheddar", as they called it, Tuhuma wasn't aiming to provide for himself, or get rich, or buy an expensive condominium on the beach. He was simply trying to make money for his family. He has a sick sister in the hospital and a struggling single mother. Aside from a cigarette or two, Tuhuma had never taken any drugs. Still, when the situation was dire, he had to resort to means of questionable morality. Dealing Sumu seemed like a tempting option.

And Tuhuma was confident that, soon, his family would have more money than they had ever dreamed of.

"Yo!"

The cub was snapped out of his thoughts by the very person that he despised with every atom of his existence.

Flicking his head up, Tuhuma scowled at the sight of Moto sauntering towards him as if he owned the entire jungle.

"What's up, bro?" said Moto, greeting the cub with the grin that Tuhuma felt like smashing to pieces with a golf club. "Slinging some S right now?"

"Yeah," Tuhuma grunted, avoiding eye contact with the druggie and hoping that he would leave within a few minutes.

"Cool, cool," said Moto, glancing around the area, as if checking to make sure that no one was watching. Most likely, Tuhuma mused, the guy was paranoid out of his mind most of the time. Just one of the many adverse effects of Sumu use. He often wondered why people were so stupid to take the stuff. Still, if he could profit from prying on their weakness, then so be it. "How much you got right now?"

Tuhuma glanced in the direction of the bush behind him where he kept his stash to sell. "Not much," he reported. "Only half a pound or so left."

"Looks like you've sold a lot," chuckled Moto. "Still, it's not like you're gonna sling more than me, right?" He hit him playfully on the shoulder.

Tuhuma resisted the urge to slice Moto's throat open. "We'll see," he said confidently, sure in the knowledge that he would overtake the cubs someday. "You might be surprised."

"No," Moto said with a smile, shaking his head. "No, I won't."

That was when Tuhuma heard the gunshot.

It took the cub a few moments to realise where it had come from. At first, he feared that maybe relations between another dealer and a customer had become heated nearby – but then he saw that the answer was right in front of him.

Moto was holding the gun.

Tuhuma stared at him in disbelief, his gaze shifting downwards to look at the bleeding wound in his stomach.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three more bullets struck Tuhuma in the chest, one of them piercing his heart as he was knocked onto his back from the force of the shots.

He lay there, dying, with the soul-crushing knowledge that his family would never get that money now...

Moto stood over Tuhuma, pointing the gun at his forehead.

"Fire in the hole, pussy."

And then everything went black.

Sarafina awoke, as she usually did, with a yawn. Even though TPYMK had more or less accepted the fact that she was now sleeping in his bed, the lioness rose with the expectation that he would be long gone by the time she opened her eyes. It was as if he didn't even want to acknowledge her – in this way, at least. Any other time of the day, he was with her all the time, so what the hell was wrong with this? His actions were lost on her.

However, she was surprised – pleasantly so – to find that the former detective was still asleep in bed next to her. She was stunned even further when she discovered that one of her forelegs was draped over his body like some kind of protective blanket. Either this was an accident, or her feelings for him had activated some kind of instinctive action to act in such a tender way. Whatever the case, she wasn't complaining.

Stretching her legs out and injecting some energy into her body, Sarafina hauled herself out of bed, amused by the fact that she had woken up before TPYMK for once. She knew that he was a light sleeper; maybe he just fell asleep a little later than her. It was the most likely possibility.

The thought never once crossed her mind that it might be something more than that.

Ugh... Sarafina licked the inside of her mouth, discomfited to find that it was bone dry. *I need a drink. As long as the only thing in the fridge isn't Cheese Milk or something.*

The lioness padded slowly out of the room, casting one more meaningful glance towards TPYMK before disappearing through the open doorway.

Sarafina pulled open the refrigerator door, happy that TPYMK's affinity for cheese products didn't stretch as far as beverages. She pulled out a bottle of chocolate milk – he already had about ten more of them in there – before unscrewing the lid and taking a nice, long sip.

That hit the spot, the lioness thought. TPYMK's favourite drink had obviously rubbed off on her, since it was now her favourite drink, too. It was the first thing he'd offered her after they met. That felt like a lifetime ago by now, though. Her life had completely changed.

Then again, in some ways, it hadn't. Only a few days ago had she been the victim of Sumu use, the only difference being that this time was by force. Sarafina supposed that some things never really changed, whether you wanted them to or not. Drug use was a vicious circle with her. Every time she tried to escape, something always pulled her back in.

But, by this point, she had made her mind up. No matter what happened – no matter how many psychos tried to force her to snort Sumu or jab a needle into her leg – she was going to fight until her last breath. No one would ever subject her to that torture ever again. And if it came to a choice between either snorting Sumu or death... then she knew what she would choose.

No more. That was her philosophy now.

"Good morning."

The lioness stared in the direction of the kitchen doorway, to find TPYMK stood there, already fully clothed. She blinked in astonishment. *How the hell does the jerkoff manage to dress so quickly? The dude's like Batman or something.*

"Uh... morning," Sarafina said, trying to exorcise thoughts of the former detective's wardrobe from her mind. She raised her bottle of chocolate milk in a sign of greeting, only for it to—

Wham!

—crash to the floor.

The lioness watched as the bottle impacted with the linoleum, sending milk splattering all over the place. The big chocolate puddle had created quite a mess, causing Sarafina to roll her eyes as a means of scolding herself for being so clumsy.

TPYMK stared at the spilled milk for a moment. And for a spilt second – the tiniest amount of time – he looked utterly horrified. No one else would have picked up on this, anyway – and why should they?

They didn't know the truth.

"Ugh," Sarafina grumbled, bending down to pick up the now empty bottle. "Sorry."

"It's all right," TPYMK assured her, grabbing a mop that was leaning against the doorway and acting quickly to soak it up. He smiled at the lioness. "No use crying over spilled milk."

She chuckled slightly at the quip, impressed that he was actually showing a sense of humour for once. He did have the capacity to act happily every once in a while, when thoughts of drug gangs and dealers weren't occupying his brain. Sadly, that seemed to be most of the time these days.

"You don't need help?" she asked.

"No," he replied, mopping up the last of the spilled milk. "I've got it."

Sarafina dumped the bottle in a trash can, sighing as she stared out of the window. Morning sunlight filtered in through the glass. It was a pretty good day, all things considered. Maybe one that wouldn't be tarnished by a deadly shootout or a psychotic attack. The lioness even mused on perhaps asking TPYMK out to dinner and maybe—

"I need your help with this Family, though."

Drat.

Sarafina stared into TPYMK's eyes, pondering on whether to speak her mind or not. But she relented eventually. "Uh... look, TPYMK, but... I think maybe we should... you know... call it a day on this."

The former detective narrowed his eyes in confusion, as if the lioness had just grown an extra head that looked like Godzilla. "'Call it a day'?"

"Yeah," Sarafina nodded. "I know that detective guy's on your butt and all, but... I mean, we could always move to, like, Alaska or something instead. Get away from all this."

TPYMK looked as though he was considering it for a few moments. "No," he finally said, putting the mop carefully back in its original position. "I promised to finish this, and I will."

"But—"

"Don't worry," he interrupted, raising a hand. "I know. You don't want to be a part of this anymore. You won't. I wouldn't let you even if you wanted to. This has gone too far. I'm going to take care of this business myself from now on. You've done more than enough."

"That's not what I mean," Sarafina began, although she soon gave up on arguing the point. "Oh... never mind."

"Everything's gonna be fine, Sarafina," TPYMK told her. "I'll make sure of it."

"Sure," Sarafina mumbled, walking out of the kitchen and heading for the living room, hoping that there would be some good shows on the TV. It was always a welcome distraction. For a few hours, she could be someplace else, without having to worry about what tragedy would befall them next. "Whatever you say."

TPYMK directed one more conflicted glance at the spot where the chocolate milk had been spilled, before crossing over to the sink to wash some dishes.

Bang!

Moto chuckled as the dealer's brains splattered all over the trunk of the tree, sending the lion crumpling into a heap on the ground. He regarded the dead body with a look of intense curiosity, before staring at his weapon.

"Dude, this gun's like a vacuum, but in... reverse."

He smiled at his comparison, before remembering that he had a meeting to attend to. Being high on drugs practically all day, he often forgot where he was supposed to go and what he was supposed to do.

Still, at least he remembered now. That was the main thing.

"Gotta scram, man," he said to the corpse. He waited for a moment, expecting a response, but then he remembered that dead people didn't talk. The cub proceeded to saunter off, wobbling slightly as he struggled to keep his balance. "Got some pussies to see..."

"And now it's back to *Scud the Wonder Dog!*"

Sarafina stuffed another handful of cheese puffs into her mouth, chewing on them loudly as she watched her favourite cartoon on the TV. TPYMK was busying himself in the living room, washing the windows and watering the plants; that kind of stuff. She would have compared him to a housewife if she wasn't so engrossed in the show.

"Okay," TPYMK said, checking his watch as he headed for the front door. "I'm going to the store. I'll bring back McDonald's for dinner."

"Right on," Sarafina said, her eyes never leaving the TV.

"You want some more Cheetos, I take it?" TPYMK said, glancing at the huge bowl of the aforementioned foodstuff she had resting in her lap.

"You bet, yo," was her reply.

"Thought so," said TPYMK. "See you later."

The lioness vaguely recalled hearing the front door shut in the background, but pretty much ignored it as she continued watching TV.

"I seriously hope you took care of our little task," Zira said, scraping her claws across the table, as if she were trying to sharpen them for added pain effect. "You know important this business is to us, Moto."

"It's all good, homies," said Moto, grinning at the Family of Blood, lying back in his chair. "I capped off five of them."

"Are you sure they were the *right* five?" questioned Vitani, raising an eyebrow in doubt at Moto. He may be a good dealer, but his mind had turned to sludge after taking so many drugs. Then again, she mused, he had probably been like that for a long time before.

"Yo, I got 'em all," said Moto confidently. "The top five dealers – other than me, of course. Just like you said."

"They're all dead?" said Zira, narrowing her eyes.

"I shot them more than I shoot into my babes," Moto replied with a cheeky wink. Zira scowled in disgust. "They're deader than dead. You should've seen the blood splatter. It was like *bam* and then *jam*!" He laughed loudly, amused by his own idiotic words.

The Family of Blood stared at him for a good few seconds. Even Nuka stopped his incessant scratching to cast him a bemused glance.

"Okay – whatever those sentences meant, I'll take your word for it," Zira said, finally breaking the silence. She looked to her daughter. "I want you to organise a clean-up operation for those bodies. Can't have HPD finding them. They've already picked up some of our smaller dealers. God knows what would happen if they got hold of the top ones – whether they're dead *or* alive."

"How come you've haven't killed me yet, then, huh?" asked Moto. "'Cause I'm like, the Superman of dealers."

"The same reason we got you to do the killings," Zira replied simply. "You're far too stupid."

Moto's grin widened. "Well, I aim to please!"

TPYMK was good at lying.

He prided himself on this. It was a useful tactic, and he knew it. Even though he wore a fedora and a long trenchcoat that would put Inspector Gadget to shame, he still retained a certain sense of anonymity. No one knew his name, no one knew his age, and he gave the impression of someone you could trust. It was perfect.

Still, he felt bad about lying to Sarafina for the nine thousandth time. He would bring back some dinner for them later, but there were higher things on his mind at the moment. The Family of Blood, namely. They had hurt the person he cared about the most, and he wouldn't rest until they were either buried six feet under the ground or rotting away in a jail cell. He preferred the former.

The former detective drummed his fingers on the steering wheel of the Junk-Mobile, the car that Sarafina had given such a pathetic name to. TPYMK had come to know it by this title, however; he couldn't even remember the original name of the vehicle. He just needed something to get him from A to B, and that was all that mattered.

He watched the forest with careful eyes, searching for any signs of movement. He knew that the Family of Blood had found out that Sarafina was involved with the other side of

the law – the *right* side of the law – and had beaten her until she was black and blue as a punishment. It was barbaric.

Still, what perplexed TPYMK to no end was how they had found out. He hadn't spotted anyone watching while he was parked in the car waiting for the lioness, so how on earth did they know? There had to be something he was missing...

The last human on earth checked his watch and saw that he had been sitting there for an hour already; he'd spent more than enough time conducting surveillance of the forest. TPYMK leant back in his chair, accepted the fact that nothing was going to pop up right in front of him, and started the car.

However, as TPYMK pulled into the dirt road, he saw a flicker of movement in the bushes.

He braked to a halt, narrowing his eyes in the bushes' direction. At first, he thought that he was just being slightly paranoid, and that it was only the light summer's breeze causing the sudden motion. But the more he stared, the more he realised that it looked like a big pair of eyes was watching him from the bushes.

Or... a pair of binoculars.

The former detective frowned, watching with surprise – and quite a bit of fear – as a mane emerged from the bushes. It was a lion. Scratching his head, to be precise. And he was holding a pair of binoculars.

It didn't take long for TPYMK to realise that Detective Bora was watching him.

Oh, Christ.

Acting on instinct, he sped away in the car, ignoring the fact that it would only arouse Bora's suspicions. TPYMK was only concentrated on one thing: getting home to Sarafina. Bora wasn't dead, and that could only mean trouble. If he was watching him, then he obviously was trying to make an arrest.

TPYMK wasn't going to let that happen.

Screeching into the driveway, TPYMK practically dived out of the car and grabbed for the front door, sending it flying open. He ran down the hallway, expectant that Sarafina would still be watching TV in the living room.

Luckily, he was right. The lioness lay lazily on her side, having finished off her bowl of Cheetos. Now she was just watching more bizarre programming. It looked like two radio-controlled cars were attacking each other with axes.

"Yo, I hope you brought me more of those McNugget thingies," Sarafina muttered. "They're the—"

The lioness yelped as TPYMK yanked her to her feet. "Come on," he said urgently. "We have to go."

"Go?" Sarafina replied, confused. "Go where?"

"Go," TPYMK said. "I mean, leave town. It's too dangerous for us to stay here. Come on."

He started to pull her away, only for her to protest. "Hey, can't I finish watching *Robot Wars* first?"

"Do you not understand the situation at hand here?" TPYMK asked, staring hard into her eyes.

"Uh, *no*," Sarafina retorted. "Because you never ever explain anything to me until, like, the last minute. First you go out and you're all like, 'Hey, I'm going to get some Big Macs,' and then you come back and half the world has blown up."

"Okay. I will explain this to you. You know that detective – the one I tried to poison?"

"Yeah," Sarafina said, not really understanding what TPYMK was getting at.

"Well, he's not dead," TPYMK told her. "He obviously didn't drink the coffee, or he became distracted, or... Look, we just need to get out of here. If we move somewhere else, somewhere remote – maybe even Alaska, like you said – then he won't be able to track us down."

Sarafina mused with irony that the most effective poison in the world had failed to work twice for them. It seemed that no one ever took the bait. Moto didn't eat his pasta and Bora didn't drink his coffee. *Maybe it only works with more interesting food*, she thought. *Like... pizza or something.*

"All right," Sarafina grumbled. "I'll go pack."

"Hurry up," TPYMK urged, as the lioness walked off. "We don't have much time."

Wham!

The former detective whipped round upon hearing the front door crashing inwards, and concluded that they had no time at all.

Sarafina stood still on the stairs, watching as Detective Bora stormed into the room, staring at TPYMK with burning fury.

That was when he forced him up against the wall.

"You scumbag," Bora snarled, staring with hatred into TPYMK's eyes.

"Yo, leave him alone!" Sarafina yelled, shoving Bora away from him, only for the detective to retaliate and push the lioness hard to the floor.

"You have no idea, do you?" Bora shouted, pointing at TPYMK with a claw. "*Do you have any idea what he's done?*"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Sarafina asked, picking herself up from the floor. "You're crazy, man!" She looked at TPYMK. "Tell him he's a nut job!"

"You scheming little..." Bora couldn't find the right words to describe him. "You lie to everyone just to cover up what you did. You're scum."

"*You're* the liar," Sarafina argued. "Just leave him alone!"

"Oh, yeah," Bora said. "I'll leave him alone, all right. *In jail.*"

The lion moved towards TPYMK, only for Sarafina to step bravely in front of him. "No," she said firmly. "Get out."

"Move out of my way," Bora threatened, "or I'll arrest you with him."

"No!" Sarafina shouted. "You tell me what he's done! Go on! Tell me the exact thing that he's done wrong!"

Bora just stared at her.

"He shot a baby."

AN: I'm not sure what this ranks as on my Evil Cliffhanger Scale, but it's a definite high! So, we know what horrible deed TPYMK has committed. Plus, Moto is now murdering dealers for the Family of Blood. That empire keeps growing... This is extremely worrisome for all the good guys. But is everyone's favourite detective really a good guy after all? I suppose we'll have to wait and see.